

The Living Word of the Buddha

The Buddha's Teachings in the Oldest Texts

Translations, essays & notes by Piya Tan ©2016

Volume 49b

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*The Buddha and the arhats awaken the same way;
the Buddha discovers the way and the disciples follow after him.*

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Life of the Buddha 1

SUTTADISCOVERY49b

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THE MINDING CENTRE, based in Singapore, is part of Piya Tan’s Dharma ministry. It was founded in 2006 to provide non-religious Dharma-based services to those in need of counsel and solace. It also serves as a haven and hub for those seeking Dharma by way of critical thinking, creative feeling, meditation, sutta translation and study, spiritual experience, and sharing that light and joy. The Centre also supports and promotes Piya Tan in his full-time Buddhist and related work.

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THE SUTTA DISCOVERY SERIES is part of the Living Word of the Buddha project which aspires to present and encourage an exploration of early Buddhism, both in a Dharma-inspired and academic manner for personal development as well as outreach work on a local and global scale. The Minding Centre and the Living Word of the Buddha project are motivated and guided by a quest for the historical Buddha and a vision of mere Buddhism.

Suttas: <http://dharmafarer.org>

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Piya Tan (TAN Beng Sin), 1949-
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(Aṭṭha Dāna Sutta, A 8.31/4:236)

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As people today become more aware of Buddhism, many seek the simple original teachings of the Buddha. For over two decades now, Piya Tan has been inspired by this ideal of “mere Buddhism.” In this connection, he has set up the Minding Centre and Pali House.

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Pali House is possible through the generosity of the Buddhist community and various individuals like yourself who have generously and regularly contributed to Piya Tan's work. He is doing full-time lay Dharma work without any salary. As such, your continued support will greatly help our Dharma work.

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The most direct way to learn Buddhism is to read and live the Pali suttas which contain some of the oldest records we have of the Buddha's teachings. As we search these scriptures, we will discover ourselves amidst their stories, teachings and practices, and even take a first step towards spiritual awakening.

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The Sutta Discovery (SD) series started with **the NUS Buddhist Society** weekly Sutta Study Group (SSG) classes in February 2002, and **the Buddhist Fellowship** SD series started in February 2003. The SD materials are now freely available worldwide on dharmafarer.org. There is an on-going global team of volunteer **Sutta readers** who regularly study the suttas and essays, and proof-read them at the same time.

Piya Tan, who works on these Suttas and notes, and teaches them, was a former **Theravada monk** for 20 years. Today he is a full time lay Dharma teacher specializing in early Buddhism. He was consultant and regular lecturer to the Buddhist Studies Team (BUDS) that successfully introduced **Buddhist Studies in Singapore Secondary Schools** in the 1980s. After that, he was invited as a visiting scholar to **the University of California at Berkeley, USA**. He has written many ground-breaking and educational books on Buddhism (such as *Total Buddhist Work*) and social surveys (such as *Buddhist Currents* and *Charisma in Buddhism*).

As a **full-time Dharma teacher**, he runs Buddhist, Sutta and Pali classes like the basic Pali course series, the Sutta Study Group (NUSBS), Dharma courses (the Singapore Buddhist Federation), Sutta Discovery classes (Buddhist Fellowship and elsewhere), and Sutta-based (including meditation) courses (Brahm Education Centre), besides his own full-time **Pali translation and research project**, the Pali House, and doing a comparative study of the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas. As a Theravāda monk, he learned insight meditation from **Mahasi Sayadaw** himself in the 1980s. As a lay teacher, he learned forest meditation from the **Ajahn Brahmavamsa**. He has run numerous **meditation courses and retreats** for students and adults (including non-Buddhists) since 1980s. In 1992, he taught meditation at the University of California at Berkeley, USA, and also to BP, JPMorgan, the Defence Science Organization, GMO, HP and SIA. He is doing all this for the love of Dharma and of Ratna and their two children.

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Hi!

[Pali: "For, because; certainly, indeed; alas!"]

Dharma is here and now

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS ARE LIKE MAPS. We may have them but they are useless if we do not look at them. After carefully looking at them, we need to make the journey ourselves. While we are journeying, we will see the path, the landscape and beautiful sights for ourselves, and begin to understand the map even better. When we have reached our destination, we do not need the map any more.

EXPERIENCE, NOT JUST QUALIFICATION. Today, we have numerous Buddhist speakers, some qualified ones, some even scholarly specialists, but knowing the Dharma and living it are quite different things. We may *know* Buddhism (we may have the map), but have we really tasted *inner peace* (made the journey) and do we really *care* about others, even those close to us (compassion for other travellers)? **The Lohicca Sutta** (D 12 = SD 34.8) advises us to realize the teaching before teaching it.¹

DON'T LIVE IN THE PAST. In a fast-growing affluent society like ours, we tend to measure others by wealth, status, titles, professions, even skin colour. This unhelpful tendency is often because of our colonial past and current globalizing trends. If we do this, then we are living in the past. We must also appreciate the wealth of wholesome potential in our present, and lay a strong foundation for our future as Buddhists. When we speak in this way, we will hear other concerned voices, too. Let us listen together.

In other words, we are still evolving as local Buddhists. We must not only evolve as a *group*, but more importantly, we must mature as *individuals*.

THE TRUTH OF OUR SITUATION. To correct such difficulties, we must first talk openly about them. **The 4 noble truths** is a helpful for examining such situations. First, we must accept and define the problem; secondly, identify its causes and conditions; thirdly, think and

discuss the possible solutions; and fourthly, work on the solutions.

WHILE LOOKING AT THE HORIZON, LET US KNOW THE GROUND WE ARE STANDING ON. Even after working with the Suttas for 15 years, translating and annotating over 50 volumes of Sutta Discovery (SD) (each of about 180-200 A4 pages), I still meet local Buddhists who ask me questions like: "Why do you do it when we already have other translations." If they care to look at the back covers of the SD books, there are at least 20 reasons for it! Some asked: "Are you sure you are qualified enough to translate the suttas?" Why not read the SD translations for yourself?

"To-date I think the Sutta Discovery Series is the most comprehensive and thought provoking work available." (Clement Tan, Malaysia)

Ironically, here is a double bind. We would not know how good a translation is until we have read it. Even then, our judgement depends on how much we love the Dharma ourselves.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS. This is still a time when we are learning and serving numerous foreign Buddhist groups. This formative period is vital for the growth of Buddhism here. True spiritual growth, however, begins when we realize that Buddhism need not be foreign and exotic: the Dharma is *not* out there. The Dharma is *right here* where we live. The Bodhi tree grows here, too, if we plant it, care for it, weed the ground, and gather around it or sit under it enjoying its cool shade. In **the Pāṇāṇika Sutta 2** (A 3.20 = SD 37.2b) the true practitioner is compared to a shrewd store-keeper²

INDEXES TO SUTTAS AND REFLECTIONS

For your convenience, look up these Indexes at <http://dharmafarer.org>:

- (1) **the Sutta Title Index (STI)** to SD 1-49 (54 vols),
- (2) **the Dictionary of Early Buddhism (DEB)**, index to the SD series; and
- (3) **the Reflection Index** to over 460 reflections (since 2007).



¹ <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/34.8-Lohicca-S-d12-piya.pdf>

² <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/37.2b-Papanika-S-2-a3.20-piya.pdf>